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# The Sentinel-News

Wednesday, October 02, 2002



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## News

### Phase I panel spends first million, starts phase 2

By Walt Reichert  
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Two years ago, the seven members of the local Phase I Tobacco Settlement committee were confused and frustrated. Uncertainty about their role, mixed signals from the state Tobacco Settlement Board and long delays in sending out checks had several ready to abandon ship.

Today, the farmers on the committee charged with spending the county's share of Phase I Tobacco Settlement money -- about \$1 million -- have found smoother sailing. All have re-enlisted for another two year term.

"The first year we didn't have an idea what we were doing. The state knew the county boards were out there, but they weren't helping. Now the people at the state understand what we are doing and we stay ahead of their regulations. It was just a lot of wrinkles to iron out," said Phase I committee member Doug Langley.

Committee member Jack Trumbo praised Cooperative Extension for Agriculture agent Brittany Edelson for her persistence in working with the state and the committee to sort through the myriad requirements from the state board.

"If it hadn't been for her, we wouldn't have gotten a fraction of that money spent," Trumbo said.

After working through a survey of the county's agricultural strengths and weaknesses and setting goals and priorities, the committee started approving proposals for projects ranging from \$25,000 to help 4-H and FFA kids buy livestock showing equipment, to \$246,000 to the Shelby County Fairgrounds for a new livestock showing facility and farmers market, to \$150,000 for ag diversification projects that included anything from rabbits and chickens to blueberries and mushrooms. The Shelby County Farm Bureau, the Shelby County Cattlemen's Association and the Shelby County A & M (the fair board) all became partners with the committee to oversee the projects.

The board managed to spend all but about \$70,000 of the \$1 million in funds. That money will be carried over for projects approved over the next two years.

Committee members generally agreed that the money spent on the livestock facility at the fairgrounds has the best chance of benefiting the largest number of farmers as well as the community at large.

"We thought the barn might best help the general economy with the many functions and training programs that will be held there," said committee chair John Kalmey.

The 90 by 250-foot building is now under construction. Randy Tennill,

who is working on the wiring for the building this week, said the building should be ready to rent between Nov 1-15. Board member Tom Flowers said the cost share programs for cattle handling facilities, genetic improvement and forage improvement also have potential to help large numbers of farmers in the county.

### **Looking ahead**

According to recently released figures by the state Agricultural Development Board, the county will have about \$800,000 in Tobacco Settlement funds along with the \$70,000 from last year to spend over the next two years.

The only fly in that ointment is the budget impasse at the state level. "Right now we don't have anything. But all of the senators and representatives are telling us we are going to get the money no matter what happens. For the time being, we are still a sacred cow," Edelson said.

The local board will continue to fund the cost share projects for cattle and forage improvement and grain and hay storage over the next two years, committee members say.

It is also working with the Area Technology Center and the community college to offer classes in welding, computers and other hands-on courses for farmers.

"Other new projects are going to pop up, new types of farming that we haven't thought of yet," Trumbo said.

However, Edelson said the panel will eventually have to look beyond the local cost share programs to spend the Phase I funds.

"There are only so many farmers in Shelby County and only so many willing to jump through the hoops to get the money. They are small hoops but they are hoops," Edelson said.

She said the panel may have to look toward regional initiatives that involve several counties' funding projects to help farmers. Tapping into the Louisville retail and wholesale food market with a regional effort would be one way to spend Phase I funds that would further help county farmers, she said.

"I think we have the kind of board that is progressive enough to do that," Edelson said.

### **Offset tobacco losses?**

No matter how they spend Phase I dollars, committee members generally agree that replacing income lost to tobacco over the last several years will be a struggle difficult to win.

"It will help our producers be better producers. In some of the counties it would help more. But Shelby County has just been too dependent upon tobacco," Edelson said.

Committee member Bill Gallrein said the Phase I funds will help farmers start projects but after that they will have to work hard at producing quality products and at marketing if they are to make a go of new initiatives.

"All of these will be a helping hand and will be trial and error. There never has been a cure-all," Gallrein said.